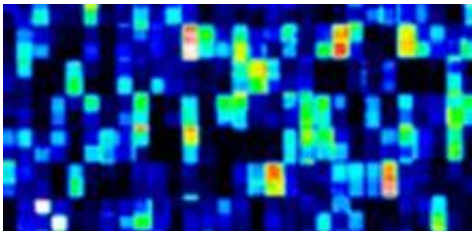


# Choir sing their own genetic code

July 14 2010, by Lin Edwards

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(PhysOrg.com) -- A choir in London, England, has performed a new choral composition in which the choir members sang parts of their own genetic code.

The idea for the piece, called “Allele,” began when consultant anesthetist Dr Andrew Morley realized that musical notes look a bit like genetic sequences. He said he saw the genetic code as a thing of wonder and beauty, but also as “raw material that could be translated into notes.” Having sung with choirs and composed a little music himself, Morley decided to assign a note to each of the four bases making up the human [DNA molecule](#).

Morley then consulted with what he called a “proper composer,” Michael Zev Gordon, to see if it would be possible to create a musical composition from genetic sequences. Gordon was inspired by the idea, and agreed to write the music. The text was provided by renowned poet and author Ruth Padel.

The choir chosen for the work was the New London Chamber Choir (NLCC), which specializes in challenging contemporary choral music. The forty members of the choir had their own DNA decoded for the work as part of a scientific study to see if it is possible to tell genetically what it is that distinguishes great singers from other people. Gordon then arranged the notes corresponding to the singers' genetic codes into a musical piece for the choir.

The piece begins with a single voice singing a simple rhythm, and then more voices join in to convey the idea of replication and reproduction. At the climax of the work each singer is singing part of his or her own [genetic code](#).

The choir's conductor, James Weeks, said the work was “an evocation of the extraordinary wonder that is the genome.”

The scientific study is comparing the DNA of 250 members of choirs including the NLCC members with the DNA of 250 non-musicians. The scientific results are not yet available.

Allele was performed on 13 July at the Royal Society of Medicine in London as one component of an event called [Music from the Genome](#).

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